GHOST-BEREFT

AND OTHER VERSES

JANE BARLOW

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GHOST-BEREFT

AND OTHER VERSES

GHOST-BEREFT

WITH OTHER STORIES AND STUDIES IN VERSE

BY

JANE BARLOW

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To M. L. B.

A solace fond and sought in Fate's despite,
If I must never please you any more,
You that toward joy, be it e'er so dim, of yore
Turned sweet and fain as turn your flowers
toward light:
Nay, since thus late my poor small gift I write
Yours, 'tis in truth as who should wave you o'er
Surge of wild seas from shadow-blinded shore,
Or cry your name through echo-less wastes of
night.

Yet as one cast away on loneliest strand,
Past hail of hope, still signs with voice and hand,
Lest doom in utter dread on his heart should fall,
Hearkening that hush: even so far off I seem
To cry to you, mavrone, and beckon; and dream
You see the hand, and dream you hear the call.

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GHOST-BEREFT

A SCENE FROM BOGLAND IN WAR-TIME

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

WIDOW BRENNAN.
LADY KATHLEEN MACNEILL.
NORAH FARRELL.
NELLIE CONNOR.

A little glen traversed by a path, running along the bank above a rocky stream, and shut in on the side farthest from it by a thick screen of shrubs. In a recess among them a wooden seat stands facing the stream. On the extreme left the path ends at a small gate in a Gothic stone arch. On the right it branches, one path winding down, with wide

steps here and there, to the water's edge, the others running on under overarching boughs. The time is about sunset on a showery evening in May. Along the path from the gate comes the WIDOW BRENNAN. *She wears a long black hooded cloak and a white frilled cap.*

WIDOW BRENNAN.

I THOUGHT by now for sure the sun was down,
But still there are leaves of fire, like, flickering by
Along in the water. Ay, and there is himself
Red yonder through the trees: a handsbreadth clear
Of daylight yet; the lonesome days pass slow.
It seems a great while since the Angelus bell
Was ringing over at Moygort; and the house
Had grown so dark I scarce could see my hand—

The shower it must have been that made
things black—
And so I am here too early. After dusk
Was fallen, they said. Indeed, and after dusk
He would oft be coming home this very way,
The time he worked about the gardens here,
Before I had ever a dread next year would
bring
The 'listing and the war to break our hearts.
And here some nights he would stop awhile,
he said,
To smoke his pipe; he liked the water's sound
That is twisted through the stones. Then only
a step
Beyond the gates, and he would be stooping in
At the dark of our little low door—too low, in
truth,
For him that stood a tall six foot and more
Or ever he turned seventeen. No bigger man

The Rangers had than Larry, I will go bail.
The easier maybe so their bullets found him,
That killed the little gossoon on me. Now
I will sit down here awhile; it won't be long
Till underneath these boughs 'tis dark enough;
And if the lad knew I was waiting for him,
He would come belike a bit the sooner—ay,
He would, I am thinking.

NORAH FARRELL, *in a blue gown and white muslin apron and cap, runs after and overtakes her.*

NORAH FARRELL.

Oh! Mrs. Brennan, ma'am,
I have lost my breath with running—how is
yourself?
Too late I am. They kept me talking on
Below there at the lodge, and 'twill be dusk
Ere I can slip through all these shrubbery
paths.

Look, there's a cloud-bank building in the west
As black as a turf-stack; presently 'twill take
The last of the sun setting. That long yew-walk
Will be thick night. What shall I do at all?

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Well, child of grace, what harm could happen you?
For ne'er a man or mortal will you meet,
Unless it was a rabbit over the lawn
Went scuttling white. Or maybe you would be scared
Because you saw a tuft of thistledown
Blow by on the wind. No need to mind the dark,
For sure, if that is all ails you.

NORAH FARRELL.

But, ma'am dear,
Some people say they have seen the Captain—
Saints (*blessing herself*)
Between us and harm!—in these same paths, or else
'Twas Larry Brennan. Different ways they tell
The story, but 'tis since the two of them
Were killed, that is sure and certain.

WIDOW BRENNAN

Larry——

NORAH FARRELL.

There—
My tongue has gone wrong again; I never meant
To tell you there was talk of him; forby
'Tis likelier now a deal they saw the Captain.
Poor Larry, what should bring him walking here?

But the poor master had a great wish ever
For this glen-shrubbery. Many a day last
Fall
He would come down with my lady, and
watch the men
He had set to plant that barefaced bank below
With little flowery bushes. Off he went,
Off to the war before they had finished it all;
And after that my lady came alone
One time, old Murtagh told me, and she stood
Looking on awhile, just like as if, said he,
Some bit of growing thing was rooted up,
And left to droop its life out in its place.
They all were sorry at heart for her, he said.
The little bushes should be blossoming
By summer, all red and white and lilac—sure,
Is that a glimmering of them through the trees,
Down yonder towards the bridge? Ah! now,
to think

The master will ne'er lay eyes on them, nor maybe
My lady, for a foot she has never set
Outside the door since first we had the news.
In Lent that was, and here is nigh Whitsuntide.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

The creature is to be pitied; left so young
And married scarce a twelvemonth yet. Last year
I would often see them both go riding by.
A handsome man he looked on horseback too,
And she as gay as a goldfinch. Ay, God knows
She is to be pitied.

NORAH FARRELL.

You might say that word
If you could see her these times, ma'am. All day

There in the musty old library she sits,
And in the darkest corner, by the shelves;
She keeps an open book upon her knee,
And when one comes she is quick to turn
a leaf,
As if a breeze went by, but sorrow the line
She reads in it. Away and far away
She looks, and what she sees the Saints
can tell.
The eyes of her are grown too wide for
aught
They will find in the world to fill them, and
her face
Is dwindled like a baby's when it pines.
Up at the House, ma'am, all of us are saying
Her people must be strange, that leave her
alone
To mope and fret so long, and ne'er a one
Come next or nigh her.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

They misliked the match,
So I heard tell; and since her wedding-day
They broke with Lady Kathleen.

NORAH FARRELL.

Set them up!
Is one of the MacNeills not good enough
For e'er a lady in the land? It is much
If they have as fine a gentleman among them
As the poor master.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Ay, but he was not rich;
And wild a bit, some say, in his younger days,
As lads are. Sure they wanted some great lord
For Lady Kathleen. Wiser wish she had
To take the man she chose. God rest his soul.
He always had a pleasant word for Larry,

And Larry liked him well. Indeed, 'twas the talk
They had about his Honour and the war,
First put the 'listing into Larry's head;
For if they had luck, he said, they might be sent
Together. Ochone, together 'tis far they have gone.
But now, belike, my lady would hate the thought
Of folks that would have parted him and her,
As if they were the war itself.

NORAH FARRELL.

True for you.
They would, maybe, only vex her talking. Sure,
I have done that same myself by foolishness,
With no harm meant at all. I mind one morning
Last winter, when she still had every day

Her heart set on his letter, old Murtagh bid me
Go tell her he had brought her naught that time
In the mail-bag. So I found her at the window,
Where she throws out the bread-crumbs to the birds,
That fluttered on the sill, frost-hungry—tits
And robins and sparrows—down they whirled like leaves,
With every one the white crumb in his beak.
'Look, look,' said I, 'my lady, you might think
They had all got wee white letters.' So she looked,
And laughed, the creature. But next minute, ah,
She thought I had gone, and: 'Ne'er a one,' says she,
Soft to herself, 'not one for me at all.'

I could have cried to hear her. And to-day
'Twas worse again; for like a fool I told her
I would take this message to the lodge myself,
Because Rose Flynn was scared with people's talk
Of how they had seen the Captain in the glen.
Woman dear! her shining eyes at that. And straight
She made me tell her every word I knew.
And then I tried my best, when the harm was done,
And said for sure the soldier walking there
Would just be Larry Brennan, if all the while
'Twas aught save some old body passing by,
That wore a scarlet 'kerchief, folk mistook
For a red coat through the trees in the darkening light.
May God forgive me; it was a great untruth
I told her, and I doubt she guessed as much.

Still, better it were to fool her if I could,
Than frighten her with letting her believe
His Honour walks. God rest him.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Very wrong
You did to disappoint her with a story
About the Captain. Yet she scarce would hope it.
For sure if e'er a soldier came the road
That is strange and darksome home to poor Rosbride,
The lad 'twould be who knows the old mother lost
Her life's light when he left her in heart-sorrow
To fret her lone; herself that all this day
Is watching yon slow sun creep out of the sky,
And thinking of the chance a shadow only
Might fall across her path.

NORAH FARRELL.

Oh, Mother of Mercy! (*Blessing herself.*)
Is it waiting here you are to meet him? Indeed,
I know you are. And there is the sun gone down.
Will he be coming now? I heard a step.
Don't leave me, woman dear. Where shall I run?
Don't leave me!

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Whist, girl, whist! (*Listening.*)
No, I hear naught.
'Tis just the shower that 's pattering by again.
What ails you, Norah? Half the sun is up yet
Behind the cloud. Well, well, I will go with you
As far as the first sunk fence, and there the House

Stands straight before you all the way. God knows
I know of naught to harm you. Afraid of Larry!

(*They go down a path to the right.*)

Enter LADY KATHLEEN *along a path on the right. She wears a black gown and widow's cap.*

LADY KATHLEEN.

Last time I came here frost lay on the grass
Along the borders, and the air was cold,
So cold, I thought how it would be warm and bright
Where Gerald was; and then I seemed to hear
The bullets shrieking in it. And now all day
It is warm and bright. I only hear the birds
That wake me singing. It will be a long, long time
Before the days are quiet and dark again.

They are happy girls who hear the bullets still,
And still, as if they dared to face and touch
Fierce lightning, read the printed, terrible lists,
And every day expect a letter still,
And cry their eyes out nearly every night
Because none came. Half glad he was, I know,
Half glad to go, even when he said good-bye,
And said: 'Don't let those rhododendrons
blossom
Till I come back to see them.' There they
are (*standing still*),
The white ones glimmering low upon the edge,
Too steady to be foam. They are early. Yet
The hawthorns and laburnums on the lawn
Have pearl and golden shadows where they
stand,
And all the jewelled tags are strewn below
The sycamore, and drifts of amber dust
And powdery floss beneath the firs and pines:

The Fall of Spring it is; these well may
blossom.
And has he come to see them now? Poor Norah
Made up some other story when she feared
She had frightened me; but what she told
me first
In her belief was truth. This path grows dark.
(*Walking on.*)
How loud the river rustles, like a wind
Among the branches, always blowing by.
Was that a step? (*Listens.*) I think the rain-
drops gather
And splash down suddenly large and heavy.
I'd hear
No step. 'Twould be a shadow stealing by
Without a sound—or could a shadow speak
A word—one word? I am near the shrubbery's
end,
For now the gate is in sight. I will sit awhile

Here, where the laurels let the drops glance through
As seldom as falling stars. (*Sits down on the seat.*)

Enter WIDOW BRENNAN *on the right.*

WIDOW BRENNAN.

No sign of him.
I made what haste I could, but she would not let me
Turn back and leave her. She was all a-tremble
For fear of seeing Larry. Sure the girl
Is foolish in her mind. You might come yet.
The moon will soon be rising, and till then
I will watch for you as many a time I have watched
In the old days; and you always came at last,
Though never, avic, 'twas by so long a road.
(*Goes up to the seat.*)

LADY KATHLEEN.

Was that a step? I hear—it is a step.
Who is there? Who is there? (*Starting up.*)

WIDOW BRENNAN.

My lady! Can it be
Yourself this night?

LADY KATHLEEN.

The evening looked so fine,
I came out—I came out to watch the sunset.
It has been a long while setting.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Praised be God,
'Tis pleasant weather; only now and again
I feel a mist and softness on the air.
Good-night, my lady, and I ask your pardon
For so disturbing you. (*Going.*)

LADY KATHLEEN.

No, no; you meant
To wait until this shower went by. Sit here,
Or I will not stay. (*They sit down.*) I know
your face so well;
I used to see you, surely?

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Ay, my lady.
The Widow Brennan I am; my little house
Is but a stone's-throw up the road beyond
The gate-lodge there; and often riding by
I have seen yourself, my lady, with his
Honour.
Just where the bog-boreen turns off it is,
With sallies by it, and a big fuchsia-bush
Against the wall, and reaching up the thatch:
You might remember.

LADY KATHLEEN.

I remember, indeed.
And sometimes grazing there a small white goat
Poor Minnehaha shied at.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Sure, my lady,
I have the wee goat yet, and all I have
She is since Larry is gone.

LADY KATHLEEN.

Your son?

WIDOW BRENNAN.

My son,
And the only son I have; a fine tall lad;
No one to match him in the parish, unless
The Captain maybe. And his Honour thought
A deal of Larry. Making sure I was

He had come safe through the battle, when
one night
A boy below at Kavanagh's spelled out
Upon the paper: *Add to killed*—God help me—
Add to killed Private Lawrence Brennan.

LADY KATHLEEN.

Ah,
Then you are all alone too, all the day.
They are very long days in the empty house,
When nobody is ever coming home,
And nothing more can happen.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Ay, and the nights—
They are cruelly long. But you are so young,
my lady,
You should be sleeping sound. As folks grow
old,

The soft sleep withers off them, like the blossom
That is blowing off the hedge at every breath
Because we are nigh in June.

LADY KATHLEEN.

I sometimes think
We pay too dear for dreams, when we awaken
In the grey morning, half forgetting; and yet
'Tis only in dreams we see—unless—they say
Strange things are seen here in the glen these times.
Have you heard?

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Strange, my lady?

LADY KATHLEEN.

Yes, for at dusk
A soldier comes and walks along this way,
And by the river. Yesterday the boys

From Laraghmena, after the hurley match,
Met him close by; and other people often.
But nowhere in Rosbride, nor round about it,
Is any soldier staying—so is it not strange?

WIDOW BRENNAN.

I would scarcely think it very strange, my lady,
If some poor lad, who left his heart at home,
And bore a wishful one overseas with him,
To break if harm befell him far away,
Should strive against the black and bitter door
Clapped in a sudden instant there between us,
Till by some chink or chance he should slip back
Once more among the old places, like a dream
Strayed out of sleep, to bid them all good-bye,
And say a longer road he would have to go
To find forgetting. Larry would try, for sure,
That knows I miss this world with missing him.

LADY KATHLEEN.

But if it was he—if it was your son come back,
Straight home to you he would have gone; not stayed
To wander here. Why should *he* stand and look
At the shrubs we planted? Norah told me——

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Larry
Was fond, my lady, of this little glen.
I mind how many a time he has said to me
The pleasant place it was. But none the more
He would e'er make free to set his foot in it, save
Of early mornings maybe, or evenings late,
Lest he might chance on some one from the House.
Sure, if he knows, he will never come this night,
To annoy your ladyship.

LADY KATHLEEN.

Ah no, ah no,
I only meant I thought he would go wherever
He would sureliest meet his mother.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Ay, he would.
So here I am. That was the wind went by,
And shook the raindrops out of the wet leaves.
Dear heart, dear heart, my lady, you look so white.
You are not afraid?

LADY KATHLEEN.

Why should I be afraid?

WIDOW BRENNAN.

That would be hard to say. And yet but now
I had Norah Farrell holding by my cloak,

And bidding me stay near her, like a child
That is frightened with some goblin in the dark,
And ready to have run three ways at once.
Troth, she set off the straight road to the door,
As if a flood's foam-waves were coursing her,
In dread of meeting Larry.

LADY KATHLEEN.

It was not Larry
She feared this morning.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Folk that fear the like
Know little what they need fear. They have never looked
Down all a life, and seen it stretching lone,
Lone, lone, away to its end that lies far off.
If only a shadow moved there, you would pray
To reach it, for its company; and even

But once to see it pass the way you go
Would seem heart's comfort.

LADY KATHLEEN.

Is there an end far off?
I see none far or near. And now you say
Not even the shadow comes to me. And yet
My way is longer maybe.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Ah, mavrone,
All lonesome roads are long. I am not so old
That days count each one like a rosary bead
In prayers you scarce will finish or e'er you sleep.
Reckon as I will, no such great age at all
Can I put upon myself: last year my hair
Was dark as yours, my lady, every thread.
It is the burning sorrows make white heads

Of black ones, as the burning flame strews over
The black peat-sods with flakes of snowy ashes.

LADY KATHLEEN.

What would you do if you were only twenty,
With never a white hair yet, no ashes yet,
But always burning grief?

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Whist, honey, whist.
Now God be good to you, and God forgive me.
Too much I make of Larry and myself;
Ay, ay, and you so young. Well, if this night
His Honour comes, not Larry, in my heart
I will not begrudge you—it will be very strange
If any come, and my lad bides away—
But in my heart I will not begrudge you him.

NELLIE CONNOR *darts out of the shrubs on the right, and is stealing across the path in front*

of the seat in the direction of the gate. She wears a white shawl and a crimson skirt. WIDOW BRENNAN *starts up and grasps her arm.*

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Is that you, Nellie Connor? In God's name
What brought you here? Whom have you
come to meet?

NELLIE CONNOR.

Ah, Mrs. Brennan, ma'am, you frightened me
Out of my senses. Let me go, ma'am dear,
And never tell a word, or I will be killed.
Mick Tierney is waiting for me at the gate.
'Tis he that 'listed at Glenmoyle last year,
And he and I were speaking long before,
But unbeknownst, for if my father knew
He would rage like fire.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

What has he against the boy?

NELLIE CONNOR.

Against him? 'Twould be hard for any man
To say Mick had his better in this country;
But sure they have set their hearts on making up
A match for me with old John Gahan, that is rich.
Faith, they might spare their pains, for if he built
His peat-stack high with sods of shining gold,
I would never look at him nor them. And now
There is no one knows that Mick is come home on leave,
And staying awhile up yonder at his brother's,
Beyond Lisconnel. So across the bog
Mick steps at sunset, and I watch my chance
To slip out after supper, and meet him here.
The folk at home would kill me if they guessed,

And I heard tell, indeed, some lads one night
Caught sight of Mick, but by the best good luck
They took him for a ghost. The morrow morn
Away he is. He is ordered to the war.

WIDOW BRENNAN.

God help you both.

NELLIE CONNOR.

By Christmas he will be home,
A corporal or a sergeant—who can tell?—
With leave to marry at Shrove. And Mick has asked
The sister he has living in the south
To let me bide with her till he comes back,
Lest while he was away my father would give me
To old John Gahan. He will bring me news from her
This night. Ah, don't delay me, woman dear,

And speak you never a word. (*A whistle from the gate.*) There, that's his whistle. (*She runs off to the left.*)

WIDOW BRENNAN.

And that was all. It seems as if a door
Shut in the dark.

LADY KATHLEEN.

There was no door, I think,
Or none that ever was opened. Now it is late,
And here we look for nothing any more;
And so I will say good-night. (*Going.*)

WIDOW BRENNAN.

Good-night, my lady.
Indeed it is cold and dark, and all the boughs
Are dripping with the rain-mists. She might get
Her death, God pity her.

LADY KATHLEEN (*going*).

Oh! afraid, afraid.
I was afraid to see him. I am glad
To think I shall not see him. Now I know
Some horrible thing has happened us. My hope
Is only fear. Afraid I am this minute
Of every rustling leaf. In the whole world
What wish is left me but to shut my eyes
On all its light, and open them nevermore?
Since if we meet it must be far beyond
This cold and dark, and past the Fear—the Fear.
(*Exit.*)

WIDOW BRENNAN.

God help the creatures: she that is at the end,
And she that is at the beginning with no thought

An end will come. Mayhap none comes but brings
After it a new beginning, here or there.

Mick Tierney? Sure my Larry is twice the man
Mick Tierney ever will be, if he lives
Till all the crows that build are young to him.
Who could mistake the two? I disbelieve
'Twas Mick folk saw here. But, please God, I will come
To-morrow after dusk and watch again. (*Going.*)
So tall a lad there is none in all the town.
It is high the heart in me leaped up with pride,
As often as I saw him stoop his head
To clear our little dark door. 'Tis low enough,
Too low it lies this night, asthore machree.
And old Theresa Joyce, says she: "'Tis higher
The heart of you would leap, if you beheld

The grandeur and the gladness in the place
Where Larry bides this day.' But sure God knows
'Tis easy for Theresa to be talking;
I'll see him stooping in to me no more.

(*Exit.*)

A shadowy form begins to move up the path from the river.

A WEATHER PROPHET

(Achill Inish. Summer, 1894.)

In the early summer of 1894, a large number of young people from the Inish were drowned by the capsizing of a hooker in Clew Bay, when setting out on their yearly journey to England for the harvesting.

I

The sun as clear as a raindrop of fire slipt
under the say this night,
That was still as the floor of the skies, lyin'
smoothened over wid light,
And niver an oar's dip on it, nor a sail but
a white gull's wing—

Ah sure not at all, not at all, I was thinkin'
of no such a thing.
If the ships of the world sailed around us,
like a cloud-wreath beltin' the sun,
Musha, who on the Inish 'ud look where they
lay? unless only that one
Could just swim up agin through the waves
wid the loadin' she had safe and sound,
Till we'd see 'twas no more than an ugly dream
that the childer were drowned.

To tell you the truth, I was thinkin' that a
cloud might be soon comin' by,
Weeny and white, for a sign that the rest
were gatherin' and darkenin' anigh;
But I'm watchin' the len'th of the day, that
seems long since the childer went,
And there's sorra a breath on the blue—we
must bide a while yet content.

II

I hear the folks sayin' down yonder I've little enough to do,
To be wishin' away the fine weather, ere the summer's rightly through.
Says Widdy Rourke: 'He's astray in his mind since they lost the little colleen,
So it's strange he talks.' But themselves are strange, or they'd know the way it's been.
For, arrah now, is it aught else but the fau't of this weary fine weather
Laves the Inish all desolit and lone, when the young ones troop off it together?
After the harvestin' work they go in the fields that are rep and mown
Far off on I dunno what townland—I'd as lief 'twas all wet bog and stone.
And always the saison they quit, the long days such a shinin' 'ill keep,

The dark of the night scarce holds room for
a bit of a dream in your sleep,
Ere the cocks 'ill be crowin', and the hole in
the wall 's like an eye blinkin' in,
And you wake and forgit she 's away, and
next minyit remimber agin.
But the sorra a step they set back while the
summer sun 's in the skies,
So its heat has a heart of cold, and its light
flares the dark in our eyes,
For lost we are, missin' the young and the
strong that have left us behind,
Wee imps wid no wit to heed aught, and ould
fools that have grieved ourselves blind;
Till there 's scarce a fut stirrin' on Achill can
better than totter or creep,
And och then but the lonesome road runs
long, ay, ay, and the hill lifts steep.

III

We wouldn't ha' let them away good or bad,
if we'd done what was right;
There 's no tellin' where childer 'ill go, when
you trust them off out of your sight;
You may think they've all manner of sinse,
and be wond'rin' the way they're grown,
Yet liker than not they'll git playin' some
quare foolish trick of their own,
And be lost ere you know. Sure we'd never
a doubt, and they startin' that day,
They'd cross safe in the big sailin' boat up
to Westport, the width of the Bay;
What 'ud ail them, wid wather and win'
keepin' quiet as a baste lyin' down?
But the next thing we heard they'd capsized
her, wid Norah on board her to drown.

IV

It 's many a trouble slips by us wid only a hairs-
breadth between:
Just a word 'ud ha' kep' her that mornin',
but now thro' black night we might keen,
And she'll heed us no more than yon rock
in the foam heeds the saygull's cry.
There was some of the lads was as plased
to be goin' as young birds to fly,
And discoorsin' of all they'd a chance to be
seein'; but Norah 'd ha' stayed
If we'd bid her, and welcome. I'm thinkin'
the crathur was three parts afraid,
Travellin' off all her lone. And what tuk her
to go was her mind bein' bent
To earn us a trifle would help when the cold
come agin us, and the rent;
And she'd talk of the full of me pipe, and
her mother's odd grain of tay,

But we knew she'd be starved if she stayed, so, God guide us, we let her away.

And the last thing she done, she went round wid meself to our bit of ould shed,
Where the black hin was hatchin' her clutch, and she seen if the crathur'd been fed.
So the two of us stood lookin' over the wall, while she picked up her bit,
Thinkin' different things. And says Norah: 'She 's better than ten days to sit;
But afore I've the chance to get home, 'tis grand chucks they'll be growin', plase God.'
Och, that come in me thoughts when I seen them this mornin' about on the sod,
Half a score of them, peckin' and pipin' and skytin' all manner of ways,
Wid th' ould hin stumpin' on thro' the lot of them, high-fut, as proud as you plase.

For thinks I: 'Sure them scuts of black balls might ha' time to swell up by our door
To the size of the aigles that roost in the clouds and the sun on Slievemore,
Ere we'll see Norah home; ay, she 's drowned in the say lyin' bright there and blue'—
So I thought in me mind, but I felt in me heart that it couldn't be true.

V

I remimber the time me poor father was tuk on us, a great while ago,
And we waked him and buried him—Heaven be his bed—in Dugort down below;
And then back wid us home to th' ould house, that was strange-like and still when we came.

And I said to meself he was gone, but I thought he'd be there all the same.
Till I streeled out at sunsettin', round to the field where we'd broken the lea,
That's a quare long stiff pull 'gin the steep of the hill, and 'twas often I'd see
Where he follied th' ould horses, nid-noddin' their heads to the sky on the ridge,
Wid their big feet all tramplin' togither in pairs as they turned on the idge
Of the headland. So there in its furrow the plough lay, laned over on one side,
Wid its handle-crooks lookin' to feel in the air for the grip that 'ud guide;
And says I to meself: 'He'll ne'er hold them agin till the whole world rusts red.'
And wid that, on a suddint, I couldn't say how, but I knew he was dead.

VI

But sure what would I see or hear tell
could persuade me this summer 'll slip
past,
And no chance to set eyes on the childer and
Norah, the crathur, at last?
Sure, why else would we watch for the days
gettin' dark, and the fields turnin' black,
And the win' keenin' could, if it warn't for a
sign they were soon comin' back?
Troth, it 's rael unnatural ould talk that long
sorry I'd be to believe,
For the latest that ever they stayed, they were
home agin come Holy Eve;
And now Lady Day 's by, there 's no terrible
time to be waitin' at all,
Though it lags like an ass wid a load lettin'
on it 's scarce able to crawl,

And somewhiles when you're wakin' at night,
or out sittin' alone in the sun,
You'll misdoubt it stands still; yet for sartin,
they're nigher every hour we get done:
That 's just raison and sinse. But she's wantin'
the wit, I keep tellin' the wife,
That consaits she 's as apt to be seein' them
come any day of her life,
Till she 's never quit hearin' the step, thinkin'
Norah 's run up our boreen—
She'd a right to know better, when, look where
you will, not a cloud 's to be seen.

VII

For the young ones have always the notion
we're sparin' them ready enough
In the clear plisant weather that smoothes
over everythin' ugly and rough,

Wid the warmth on the shore, and the light on the say. Ay bedad, they think wrong:

How'd they tell that these days they ne'er see do be all cruel lonesome and long?

So the shine of the sun, where they says to themselves we'll be sittin' content,

Shuts us out of their minds in a manner, as if it was bound to purvent

Harm from happenin' us here; and it's aisy forgettin' your folks for a while,

If you dread them no mischief, but, faith, if you do, every step seems a mile

That you tread beyond reach, wid the fear in your heart like the tug of a tether

To choke you back home. And the childer know well when we're gettin' bad weather,

It's the hard times on Achill, wid mists on the say, and polthogues on the land,

And the blasts risin' up in your face like a wall you can't touch wid your hand,
When the turf's melted down in the bog, and the praties washed out of the earth,
And the floor's like a beach wid the tide flowin' in, and a lough on the hearth,
And the win' fit to reive off th' ould thatch like dry leaves off the roof of a wood,
Till all's flooded and flittered, and nothin' you've left that's a thraneen of good.
So the childer'll be fretted to hear the storm risin', wherever they are—
Some folk says wid the Saints, and it's maybe no lie, but that's terrible far—
And they'll think how it's home agin, lendin' a hand here, by rights they should be.
Sure now Norah's the greatest opinion at all of her mother and me;

If she knew we were perished and starved,
and herself livin' happy apart,
All the say's waves rolled over her head
wouldn't drown the grief out of her heart.

VIII

So the next time the storm takes to rise
an outrageous loud whillaballoo,
I can tell well enough anyway what poor Norah
'll be safe to go do;
Ay, she wouldn't bide aisy, the win 'll turn
her home, as it drives in a wave,
Tho' she 's come where the highest you could
name are the people she 's bound to ax
lave.
Our Lady herself it might be, wid heaven's
blue in the folds of her gown,
And a glimmerin' of stars flown together, and
lit on her head in a crown,

And poor Norah 's her screed of red skirt, and her mother's ould little black shawl,
Goin' barefut—no matter for that, she'll make bold and spake up to them all,
And be thankin' them kindly, no fear but she will, she 's a mannerly child,
And she'll tell them she 's wanted at home now the saison's got stormy and wild—
Ah, since ever you left us, acushla, we're wantin' the sight of your face—
And she'll say there 's not one but herself to be doin' a turn in our place,
For her mother 's complainin' this long while, and her father 's gone failed like and ould,
And she 's 'fraid of her life they'll be gettin' their death in the wet and the could;
But if aught went agin them, and she far away, sure the heart of her 'd break.

Then the rest of the childer 'd be sayin': 'True
for her,' each word that she'd spake;
And the sorra a Saint 'll bid them lave us all
desolit here and forlorn—
Ay, the storm 's our best chance in this world,
and it 's comin' as sure as we're born.

IX

That 's the raison I'll watch a while yet, for
the haze might be gatherin' to-night,
If 'twas only a breath, it 's a grand sign for
win': or a cloud trailin' white
On the dark of the ridge, caught and tore into
flakes like sheep's wool on a wall—
Then we'd have a good chance. But some
folk do keep hopin' wid no chance at all,
Like Rose Byrne, that goes callin' her sons
to come back, mopin' round on the shore,

And herself there, that has me annoyed hearin'
steps runnin' up to the door.
Och, it 's cross wid the crathur I be, and she
ailin' and wantin' the wit;
Howane'er, when we've Norah agin, every
trouble in our lives we'll forgit.
And it won't be so long now, plase God, till
a change 'll be comin'. Some day
The sun's self 'ill be lost o'er our heads afore
ever he drops in the say,
And the moanin' away on the wather 'll come
near till it roars and it raves,
For the win' 'll grip the lan' and get swirlin'
it round in the clouds and the waves,
And the storm 'ill lep out on us, ragin' and
wild, thro' the mists and the foam,
Blindin', and deafenin', and takin' our breath—
and bringin' the childer home.

WHAT MATTER?

I

Sure I'm sorry the crathur was scared, but I meant it no harm all the while
If I peered in its face, and it stretchin' its legs down long steps in the stile,
Where I'm resting this now. There was somethin'—the blue belike clear in its eyes—
Set me thinkin' of one weeny sister I had very nigh the same size,
In the ould days a body remembers. 'Good evenin'' I bid it, but straight

It took off wid itself, skytin' under the hedge
at a wonderful rate,
Lookin' back till it seen would I follow. 'Twould
bother me finely, no fear,
Limpin' lame, I'd ha' caught it as aisy if up
it had flown in the air,
Like the birds that flirt up on their wings
when you pass where they're pickin' a bit:
'Tis a pity of frightenin' the birds and the
childer—but sure they've no wit.

II

Little Norah she never was frightened of me
but that once. I'm nigh grown
Tired of hopin' she'd maybe forget, and come
back like a robin that's flown
Wid a flutter at first, and then presently 'lights
just to spy what you're at;

But I've seen her no more, late or early, than if she'd been grabbed by a cat.

And before that she'd mostly be after me every place, high ways and low—

Faix, where Norah took into her head to be goin', it 's there she would go,

For the youngest she was of us all, and we made the great fool of her; yet,

Quare enough, ma'am, the one she liked best was meself that was nobody's pet.

It 's herself was ould-fashioned and cute; well I mind how she'd sluther and coax,

If she thought the rest had me annoyed any time wid their nonsense and jokes;

And it 's often enough I'd be frettin' and cross; ay, the hairs on me head

Were no more, so to say, than me troubles; for you see they were blazin' red.

III

Whiles I've thought to meself 'tis contrary, a colleen's no chance whatsoe'er
To be choosin' the colour she's bound the best days of her lifetime to wear:
A skirt, to be sure, or a riband bow, or a scarf, that you'll soon throw by,
Blue, as it happens, or yellow, or puce, you can take them to please your eye;
But whethen now, what great good's in that, if the best you can do after all
Is cover your head up close, and hope they'll not notice it under your shawl?
I was foolish belike to be mindin', but many a time would I fret
At their callin' me 'Red-Nob,' and passin' the ould jokes that they'd never forget.

And some people mistrusted their luck if they
met me the road that they went[1];
Sure 'twas no fault of mine it come always agin
me to thwart and torment.
So I'd envy the ones that was different. The
never a poppy I'd pick,
Like those two by this bank, but I'd wish
in me heart I'd the black of theirs
thick
On the head of me. Troth, I'd be grudgin'
the blackbirds their glossy dark wings,
I would so—and the crows in the field. But
beyond all them wild livin' things
Was I jealous of Maureen, me sister, come
home from Saint Monica's school,
For you'd think every thread of her hair had
been reeled off a silky black spool;

[1] In some parts of Ireland it is thought unlucky to meet a red-haired woman when setting out.

The great armful, that scarcely her two hands
'ud hold when she took it to twist,
Drawn out long as night's shadows, and soft
round her bit of white face as the mist;
And me own like naught better than ravellin's
you'd get from a sodger's red coat,
And me cheeks as thick dusted wid freckles
as a foxglove's quare specklety throat;
And no use to be wishin' and grievin', yet
that I done times and agin,
Till it seemed to meself me fool's head was
on fire both widout and widin.

IV

Howsoe'er, when I got past me patience, I'd
up and I'd streel off me lone
To a place I knew down by the river, out of
every one's road but its own.

Overlookin' the river our house was, and
right at the bawn's end you'd step
On the little ould hand-bridge across it, where
it whips round the turn wid a lep
Through the tumble of stones; and then on
by the bit of steep footpath you'd land
At the water's edge down in the wood, and
it runnin' so swift you must stand
And be watchin' awhile, to try listen what it
said to itself as it went;
For 'twas strange how you'd seem to hear
somethin', and ever just miss what it
meant,
And not ever be tired of the tryin'. So
there I'd me long flat-topped stone,
Wid a tall one behind it stood shaggy in
green fleeces of moss overgrown,
Like a settle folk draw to the front of the
hearth on a cold winter's night;

But instead of a fire at me feet I'd the strame
racin' by dark and bright,
And forenent me across it the height of
the bank, wid the tree-stems and roots
Loopin' out 'twixt them wide wall-faced slabs,
where the ivy trailed fine little shoots,
And one big juttin' rock that the strame ran
full tilt agin slashin' by;
People said in the corner beneath 'twould be
deep as the bank rose high.
Quare and quiet, sure, and black-lookin' 'twas,
and white circles sailed round on it slow,
Caught in out of the lathers of froth that come
down wid the wild river's flow;
And I loved to be watchin' that peltin' along,
twistin' clear heavy strands
In and out through the rocks where 'twas
weavin' and seethin' in streamers and
bands.

There was some boulders up-standin' tall;
'twould be only the maddest of floods
E'er set foot on their heads; more there was
kep' ducked low under smooth-foldin'
hoods
Where the water just drowned them; and off
of a ledge in a mane like of foam
'Twould drop now and agin white and straight
like as if it was straked wid a comb.
But the sound of it rested me heart, for it
ever swep' on wid its rush,
That seemed hurryin' to find all the trouble
of the world and be biddin' it hush;
Deep and hollow, and full up of different
voices, all dronin' in one;
If you set them to sayin' the thought you
were thinkin', they'd never be done.
So I'd hear them far up on the strame, and
fast by where the waters fall:

What matter? sez they, *sure what matter?*
Ah sure what should it matter at all?
Over and over: *What matter? What matter?*
Ah sure what matter? they'd keep;
What matter? I'd listen, *what matter at all?*
till me thoughts 'ud be half asleep.
Then there 'd somethin' cry: 'Oonah'; you'd
say a lost chicken 'twas pipin' its best,
But the same would be Norah come trottin'
to find me away from the rest,
Climbin' over the boulders as big as herself
was wid foot and wid hand,
By the strame's edge. And round me stone's
corner I'd peep, and I'd see where she'd
stand
Wid her hair ruffled out in the sun, short
and fine, like the yellowy fluff
On wee chickens—they'll niver be callin'
'Red-Nob' to her, that's sure enough—

And the minyit she spied me: 'I've got her,'
sez she, and runs headlong as quick
As the chickens themselves in delight when
you've thrown them a handful to pick.
So she'd roost there beside me, and both of
us hear how 'twould whisper and call:
What matter? What matter? Sure what should
it matter? Ah sure what matter at all?

V

And contented I was, when me troubles 'ud
vex me, wid only the strame
To console me, and Norah; between them me
dark humour'd pass like a drame,
Oft and oft. Till that once I met Hughey
Maclean, runnin' home through the wood.
'Twas a wild April day, and the wind in the
trees stooped the straightest that stood

All its own way; and if you laid hold of a bough, it 'ud strive and contend
Like some live thing you'd gripped. So I seen him along at the straight footpath's end;
And I thought to meself, would he mind the quare show I was, just skytin' past,
Wid me hair all blown loose, and the shawl flutterin' off of me head in the blast?
And I run like a rabbit. But right in a place wid no room to slip by,
Hughey met me and stopped, and: 'Fine evenin',' sez he, and: 'Fine evenin',' sez I.
Then he lifted the end of a strand of me hair on two fingers, and drew
Out its length, soft as if he was handlin' moths' wings, and sez he: 'I ne'er knew
They'd sell gold by the yard in this country,' sez he, wid the smile in his eyes

Lookin' into me own dark and kind, 'But for
sure you're the colleen that buys.'
'It's the red gold,' sez I; and sez he: 'And
the red gold was ever the best——'
And wid that a long beam of the sun come
aslant on us out of the west,
And, true for him, that lock of me hair was
naught else but the colour of gold—
'Faith, the red gold's the right gold,' sez he,
and he lettin' it slip from his hold.
I remember it well: 'The right gold,' he sez.
'Ay, and the prettiest to see.'
That was just and he turnin' to go: 'The red
gold for me, Oonah machree.'

VI

And, whatever the raison was, after that day
come the plisantest spring
In me life. Ne'er a minyit too soon of a
mornin' I'd hear the birds sing,

But was glad to be wakin', and watchin' the
light at grey chinks burnin' through,
Till I'd run out of doors and I'd find it
washed over the fields wid the dew.
And the cuckoo 'd be callin' and callin' and
callin' away like a bell
Ringin' nigh in some country far off, wid a
road to it no one could tell.
And 'twas fine only feelin' the air. Sure, those
days it 's 'Red-Nob' they might call,
Sorra bit would I fret, or go hearin' the river:
What matter at all?
But I went pullin' flowers by the edge of it
once, and as clear as could be,
Every step of the way it was sayin': *The red
gold for me, Oonah machree.*

VII

So the time shone away till the laves, that
were scarce but green mist on the brown
Of the wood, settled thick as a cloud, and the
meadows stood ripe to come down.
And one morn they were shakin' Long-Leg[1]
out of laps, heavy-wet in the rain,
That was teemin' all night, as you'd tell by
the strame, for it boomed like a train
Wid the great weight of water. But home
I was run to be fetchin' a sup
Of fresh buttermilk-whey for the lads, and
was fillin' me jug wid a cup
From the pan sittin' out on the front kitchen
window-stool; that's how I heard
People spakin' widin; and a pane was black
out—I could catch every word.

[1] The name of a field.

And I seen by a glimpse 'twas me father that spoke in the big elbow-chair,
And forenent him Matt Flynn of Cahirclone, who was great wid Macleans sittin' there;
And behind Matt stood Hughey himself; and I knew well enough in me mind
They were match-makin'. 'Deed me first thought was to run from the words like the wind;
But me feet wouldn't move; and I listened as if I was watchin' a door,
For it might be a Saint smilin' kind, or a Divil ragin' out wid a roar.
And me father was sayin': 'That 's the long and short of it, Hughey, me lad:
'Twill be Oonah I'm wishful you'd take, and the bargain you'll find none too bad.
For she 's red-headed, ay, and no beauty, I know, but, praise goodness, she 's strong.

Just a stout working-lass; and by raison of
that I'll be givin' you along
Them two heifers; and faix now the Kerry,
she's pretty enough and to spare.
A rael dexter, lad. Musha,' sez he, 'Mister
Flynn, sure that's spakin' him fair?'
And sez Flynn: 'Man alive, I'd foreclose wid
them bastes if they come in me way,
Though the girl's hair was greener than e'er
an ould mermaid wrung out of the say.'
And then Hughey sez, clear as the light:
'Sure what talk was of any such things?
'Tis a wife I come after,' sez he, 'and no
thought of the fortune she brings.
Faith, I wouldn't be troubling a one of your
bastes to step out of your shed;
All I want in the world's width is Maureen,
herself and her little black head.'

VIII

So I crep' away quiet from the window, I dunnó rightly what way I came,
Seemin' dazed like; but after a while I was down on the path to the strame,
Racin' mad. For God knows 'twas the Divil had lep' through that door, and too slow
And too late was me fastest of runnin'. But maybe I thought there below,
Where the river went tossin', and no one 'd come by, and the shade round the pool,
And the brawl of the water seemed shuttin' you in, was best place for a fool,
Who'd consaited the sun's shine scarce fit to be lightin' the world she was in,
Because Hughey Maclean would be spakin' a plisant word now and agin

To the sister of Maureen O'Connor, his sweetheart. To bide in it alone
Was me thought, if I thought. But I come—who was that had me seat on the stone?
Ah mavrone, it was Maureen herself. For that day she'd been washin' her hair,
And she'd slipped down belike to be hidin', and lettin' it dry on the air.
Hangin' loose 'twas, me arm's length, all over her cape to her lilacky gown,
Wid the black of the poppy's heart in it, and as soft as the white thistle-down;
And the weeny faint wind hardly stirred e'er a tress; you might think it had been
A hand liftin' a strand on two fingers—'twas that on a sudden I seen.
And it seemed like a wisp of me own ugly hair blowin' into me eyes,

Red and blindin'. 'What 's happened you,
Oonah ?' sez she. Thinks I : 'Whist wid
your lies ;
There 's naught happened.' But nothin' I said.
Ne'er a word bad or good did I say,
And for sure I ne'er touched her : she stumbled
there, standin' up out of me way.
I ne'er touched her. The stones would be treach-
erous and wet wid the rain in the night,
And her foot slipped, and ere you could see,
in the strame she was, out of me sight.
For a great slidin' slab of brown water druv
down on her, and passed wid one sweep,
And she under it. What could I do ? Sure
she'd sink where 'twas terrible deep,
Out of raich, out of sight. In an instant it
chanced. I done naught, only stand
Starin' round in a maze, thinkin'—was it her
face there ? or was that her hand ?

But the sorra a sign save the river leppin'
on in its welters of foam.
Then above on the high bank I looked.
There went Hughey Maclean goin' home.

IX

And I called him as near as could be. Twice
I tried it, but never a sound
Would come out of me throat; somethin'
choked me, and that set me head whirlin'
round
Like the wild water caught in the stones,
wid the flurry of me thoughts fast and
thick.
For sez I to meself: 'If he heard me, it 's
sendin' him after her quick.
Down he'll lep in the smotherin' flood to his
death. Ah, I'll let him walk on;

'Tis just takin' his life. . . . Is it watchin' him
drown I'd be, there, where she 's gone ?
'Twas no doin' of mine ; I ne'er touched her,'
sez I. ''Tis me chance so befell. . . .
When the little black head he'll be seein' no
more . . . sure you never can tell.
The red gold for me, Oonah machree. If we
met in a shine of the sun—
I'll not drown him,' sez I. Yet I'm thinkin'
the raison I done what I done
Was that spakin' to Hughey Maclean seemed
like raichin' me hand out to burn
On an iron in sparks from the flame. So
I let him go by past the turn.
And I crouched meself down on the stone,
wid the shawl o'er me head, and me
ears
Finger-stopped, to not see aught or hear ;
and the time might be minyits or years ;

I dunnó how it went. I kep' blinded and deaf, and the thoughts druv away
Wid: *What matter? What matter?* 'Twas holdin' a door agin the surge of the say.

And then somethin' come callin' and cryin'; and the touch of a hand on me arm
Took me breath. Yet whate'er it might be, I must see it—between me and harm.
It was only wee Norah had found me. But och, when I lifted me head,
'*She's not Oonah,*' sez she, and set off with a shriek that might waken the dead.
So I rose up to follow her, and there glimpsed me face in a still pool below;
And I seen what had scared her, the crathur; for me hair was as white as snow.

x

So she's gone from me sight. Sure me head
does be quare, and there's times I forget,
But there's more I remember; and wonderin'
I be they're all lost on me yet.
What's come over this country at all? When
I'm goin' the lane or the street,
I may look in a dozen of faces, but never an
ould one I meet.
And there's none calls 'Red-Nob' to me.
Whiles when I'm passin', the spalpeens
about,
'Here's the cracked one,' are yellin'. I
wouldn't be cross if 'twas 'Red-Nob'
they'd shout:
'Twas red gold, Hughey said. And sure,
anyway, now it's as white as the frost.
But you see, all the while 'twas me sister
Hugh wanted: and then she got lost

When our river run wild. I ne'er touched
her; she tripped; and I knew he'd be
drowned
If I called him. . . . But sometimes I think
more than aught else I'm missin' the
sound
Of our river that used to be sayin': *What*
matter? For many 's the strame
I go by, but the sorra a one makes an offer
at sayin' that same,
Only sighin' and moanin' so lonesome and
dreary it puts me in dread. . . .
'Tis the rest 'twould be now to me ould black
heart, ochone, and me ould white head,
If some night through the dark in the meadows
I'd hear it beginning to call:
Ah what matter? Sure what should it matter?
What matter, what matter at all?

TERENCE MACRAN

I

MUSHA, Mrs. Dinneen! How's yourself, ma'am, this long time? I'm finely, thank God,

Barrin' whiles just a touch of the cramp. I'd a right to not sit on the sod?

But this win's dhried the wet, an' the could of the air's warm enough in the sun,

So I thought I'd wait here on the bank till the school-hour widin there is done;

For you see it's the first day at all me poor Mick's little Katty's went in—

She'll be five come next May, and her granny'd a notion 'twas time she'd begin.

But the sugarsticks, ma'am, she had swallied, and I coaxin' her on down our lane,

They'd surprise you; the full pretty nigh of me pocket she's finished up clane.

'Cause if ever she got her mouth empty, she'd out wid the wofullest roar

To go home to her granny, so what should I do but keep givin' her more?

It's herself is the great little rogue. But I waited for 'fraid comin' out,

Left alone be herself wid the childher all bawlin' an' bangin' about,

She'd be scared. Not that Katty's too aisily frighted, the sorra a bit:

There's 'most nothin' she puts me in mind of so much as a wee blue-capped tit,

That hops undher your feet lettin' on it consaits it's no littler than you,

And 'ill fluff itself out like an aigle at a thrush
that could snap it in two.
Sure, just now, whin I tuk her to lave wid
the misthress inside there—that looks
Like a plisant young slip of a lass, an' she
wrote Katty's name in her books—
An' sez she, civil-spoken an' frindly: 'A
scholar we'll have her ere long,
An' she'll like to be gettin' her letters, an'
learnin' a bit of a song;
An' you'll be a good girleen for sartin',' sez
she. But sez Katty: 'I wount.'
Troth, she had me ashamed wid her thin;
but the misthress seemed makin' no
count,
On'y laughin' a bit. An' bedad if she looked
to find wit fairly grown
In a crathur like Katty, I'd think she worn't
throubled wid much of her own.

II

Was you iver to see the new school? Woman
dear, it 's a won'erful sight:
Such a sizeable room, wid the childher in
rows on the forrms, sittin' quite
As the plants in a ridge of pitaties, the crathurs,
an' scrawmin' away
At their slates an' their sums, and I dunno
what else. But our ould *Ah, Bay, Say,*
Takes a quare dale of taichin' these times,
ma'am. Sure look at the place there inside,
That 's as big as the chapel, wid boards to the
flure, and its windies so wide
They'd hould half the sky's light, an' the grand
yella blinds, an' the figures and all
Wrote that plain you could read them a mile
on the black affair up 'gin the wall;
An' the counthries in maps hangin' round—
but whoiver done *thim,* I'd ha' said

Made a botch of it; very belike he invinted
thim out of his head,
For the sorra a look of the lan' I got off
thim. 'Here's Mayo,' sez she;
Faith, 'twas just an ould jaggety patch wid
green edges, for aught I could see.
But the offer's a wee thrifle betther he thried
at the blue of the say;
I'll ha' noticed it somethin' that colour odd
whiles of a smooth shiny day.
Howane'er, it's small thanks to the childher
if they grow up as cute as ould crows,
After all the conthrivance for taichin' thim
iverythin' there in their rows,
Till they couldn't help learnin' if nothin' they
done on'y sit in the class,
Same as goin' to chapel of a mornin' you
couldn't miss hearin' the Mass.

III

Sure I won'er what Terence Macran 'ud ha' said to it now, he that had
Our ould school, and the on'y one sivin mile round us, when I was a lad.
Och, the divil a table or a forrm you'd ha' found in the classes he kep'.
But the highest ould thatch iver sthraked, an' the widest ould flure iver swep',
Terence had: for his school was out yonder above on the side of the hill,
All the same all these years; I could show you the place he'd be sittin' in still.
If you take up the grass-slope behind us, an' folly along be the path
Till the dyke cuts across it, and slip down the hollow, you're in the ould Rath[1].

[1] Fort.

It's a many a time I've throoped off there
along wid the other gossoons,
And it's many a time we come late, mitchin'
round to go pick musheroons,
While ould Terence was waitin' as cross as
a weasel up undher the hedge,
Till we'd come wid our turves and our
Readin'-made-aisys. The bank round the
edge
Of the Rath's mostly planted wid furzes an'
blackthorns, an' furze for a screen
Is worth double of thorns, that be shady an'
plisant as long as they're green,
But no betther in winther than crooky dark
claws makin' grabs in the air,
Whin the furze 'ill be thick as a stook of good
thatch ivery day of the year.
So we'd git a grand shelter; but, sure, since
their iligant school-house was built,

If you bid thim sit out on the hillside, they'd
think they were murdhered an' kilt.

IV

And 'twas could enough whiles, wid the pours
overhead, and the wet undher fut,
Or frost white on the grass, or black clouds
peltin' hail-stones as big as a nut.
Yet the bitterest blast iver blew maybe'd do
you a rael good turn,
If you'd come to a bit in your spellin' you'd
niver been bothered to learn,
For 'twas quare if you couldn't conthrive, wid
the win' to lay hould of your laves—
Our old books did be always in flitthers—and
sthrew thim about like wrecked shaves,
So afore you'd done skytin' to gather the lot
litthered round on the grass,

He'd be apt to ha' tuk up wid somebody else
and let your lesson pass.
And 'twas plisant enough of a mornin' in
summer wid dew on the ground,
An' the sun in the dew flashin' sparkles like
rainbows turned stars all around,
An' the scint of the cowslips an' clover like
honey where'er the win' 'd blow,
An' the corncrake far off, an' the larks singin'
high, an' the bees hummin' low.
Sure we'd find out a dale of divarsion 'ud
shorten the time we'd to bide,
An' in that we'd the pull I'm a-thinkin' o'er
the spalpeens on forrms there inside,
If it 's thim has the betther of us in the matter
of storms an' polthogues.
For the bank where we sat 'ud be creepin'
wid quare little ants and *keerhogues*[1],

[1] Small beetles, clocks.

An' dowlduffs—that 's a kind of ould divil you
see be the cock of their tails;
Or a butterfly 'd flutther in raich, on its wings
like the weeny white sails;
Or we'd thry set a couple of grasshoppers
leppin' along in a race.
Thin if Terence had e'er a quick lad that 'ud
learn at the divil's own pace,
It 's discoorsin' they'd stay half the day, till
you'd think their two heads 'ud be dazed,
And he'd clane forgit ivery one else. So the
rest of us done what we plased.

V

But they've grand regulatin' these times of
the lessons down here in the schools,
An' they've settled a plan to percaive if the
taichers is keepin' the rules;
That 's the raison a gintleman comes from the
College aich twelvemonth or so,

Wid the heighth of all manner of learnin' to see what the school childher know.

And it 's thin there 's the great work whativer; you might think the assizes was set,

An' the young ones all standin' their trial, to hear the quare questions they'll get.

An' the way of it is: for aich scholar who'll out wid the answers they want,

Somethin' 's ped to the taicher, but sorra the bawbee for any that can't:

So if taichers thried harder to put the right answers in every brat's head,

Divil thank thim to do their endeavours, whin they find it 's the way to get ped.

But ould Terence now, he that well knew if the finest insthructions we learned,

Till King Solomon's self was a joke to us, ne'er a doit more he'd ha' earned,

Whin he chanced on a cute sort of lad, you'd
suppose 'twas a fortin he'd found;
More sot up he'd scarce be wid his taichin'
if it brought him a clare hunderd pound.
An' the next best to that he'd be plased wid
a lot of us squattin' together,
Hummin'-buzzin' away at our book like the
bees in the bloom of the heather,
For he liked a big school, tho' it 's many a
time 'ud he vow an' declare
That poor Thady the Fool had more wit
than the most of what bosthoons came
there.
And a dacint ould innicint crathur, that couldn't
ha' tould his own name,
Was poor Thady. I dunno what notion of
schoolin' he had, but he came,
And wid e'er an ould lafe he could hould
upside-down it 's contínted he'd sit

Be the hour; he was wishful to learn, Terence said, if he'd on'y the wit,
But ourselves that had plinty 'ud liefer be skytin' about on the hill
Like the scuts of young rabbits than takin' the trouble to on'y bide still.
And thrue for him bedad. But that same's the conthráry quare way things 'ill fall,
For whin folk's grown contint to sit quiet, they've no chances of learnin' at all,
Or who'll taich thim? Yet one way or other, wid all the divarsion we tuk,
We got most of us readin' an' writin' ere ould Terence's turn of bad luck.

VI

'Twas one day he caught could sittin' out there above, and it teemin' wid rain,

'Cause Pat Blake, that was great at his figures,
kep' axin' him things to explain;
So he outs wid his bit of white chalk, and all
sorts of consthructions he draws
On the smooth of the earth where the
grass-sods were cut up in patches for
scraws;
And he sted there discoorsin' away wid his
lines and his circles an' such,
No more heedin' the wet than a speckle-faced
sheep, or not maybe so much.
But that's how he got fairly disthroyed in
his chest wid a quare furrin could;
If it's ouldish he was lyin' down, up he riz
agin oulder than ould,
Not the same man at all was he, body an'
bones, but grown feeble an' failed,
An' that moidhered an' strange, he was wrong
in his head whatsoiver he ailed.

For he'd often forget what he meant to ha' said, whin he'd scarcely begun,
Or he'd sit in a maze takin' no sort of heed what we left or we done.
So thin after a bit whin we all of us seen he was able for naught,
Musha, where was the sinse of our wastin' our time lettin' on to be taught?
An' there prisently wasn't a scholar he had, but kep' stayin' away.
Still ould Terence 'ud come to the Rath, and he'd bide there the len'th of the day,
Lookin' out for his school that came next him nor nigh him as long as he'd wait,
And he frettin' belike to himself, and a-wond'rin' what made us so late.
Ne'er a fut he'd stir home while the sun shone above him to light him a hope,

Till the hill-shadow laned o'er the glen, an' crawled up to his feet on the slope;
And he'd off wid him thin to a shielin' near by, where a lodgin' he had,
Clane disheartened he'd be wid it all, some one tould me, he thought it so bad.

VII

But one evenin' be chance young Pat Blake and meself was stravadin' around,
And we come where you look down above the ould Rath from a high bit of ground;
And sure there was ould Terence himself sittin' still on the watch for his school,
An' the sorra a sowl in it, on'y fornint him just Thady the Fool,
That had got some ould wisp of a book he was houldin', and hummin' galore,

Tho' he couldn't conthrive, do his best, what 'ud aquil the couple of score
Would be in it somewhiles. And I doubt but ould Terence was vexed in his mind
To be missin' the rest of us all for no raison he iver could find;
'Deed it 's rael discouraged he was, you might see, and 'most ready to cry,
Sittin' there wid himself and his throubles out undher the width of the sky,
An' naught heedin' unless 'twas the win' that wint rufflin' his hair white as down
On the head of an ould dandelion set round in a fluff like a crown.
So Pat watched him awhile, and: 'Me sowl from the divil,' he sez, aisy and low,
'It 's poor Thady the Fool has more sinse than us all.' And sez I: 'He has so.'

An' sez Pat: 'Well, ould Terence to-morra,' sez he, 'be the powers of smoke,
He'll be taichin' a big school whativer, or else somedbodies' heads 'ill get broke.'

VIII

An' next mornin' he planned it. Himself was the up-standin' fair-spoken lad,
So a many 'ud do aught he axed thim; but if he was crossed, he'd be mad,
So the others 'ud do what he bid thim. That 's how be some manner of manes
He got plinty of spalpeens persuaded, an' throopin' along up the lanes
To th' ould school at the Rath. Such a power, sure, of scholars as niver was seen,
And we all brought our *Readin'-made-aisys*, an' squatted around on the green.

And our turf-sods we piled in a sizeable stack there be Terence's place,
Where he sat quite contint—ay bedad, he'd scarce room on the whole of his face
For the smile at the sight of us all, and the sound of us dronin' away.
'Whethen childher, you're great at the learnin',' sez he, 'and industhrious this day.'
He said that, ma'am, and school breakin' up, whin the sunset was red on the air;
And next day not a one of us all but was glad we'd had wit to go there;
For his folk thought he'd on'y slep' on a bit late, lyin' still in his bed;
But we'd plase him no more in this world—rest his sowl—sure th' ould crathur was dead.

IX

Ah, it 's that was the bell rang widin there—
school's up, they'll be gettin' about,
All the childher, this now. Ay, they're openin'
the door, here they are tumblin' out
Like the wasps at their hole in the bank.
But where 's Katty? She 's not there at all.
What 's delayin' her? Maybe she 's someways
behind, bein' on'y so small.
I'll go look.—No, she 's yonder, she 's out
right enough. Och, the bould little toad,
Did you notice the dhrive, ma'am, she hit
Murty Doyle, 'cause he got in her road,
And he twyste her own size? Come here,
Katty acushla; I've waited, you see,
To be bringin' you home agin. Gimme your
bag, and I'll mind it, machree.

Sure you wouldn't be wantin' to stop here?
You've iligant places to play
Up at home. Come along till we look what
at all Granny has for the tay.
Keep a hould of me hand, there's a jewel, and
just step on the path where it's dhry—
An' there's maybe a sugarstick yit in me
pocket, moorneen, if you thry.

A MISUNDERSTANDING

(Connemara. Spring, 1898.)

"'Tis my bitter grief,' she said.
(The western light ebbed, streaming back
Across the ocean-strand that laid
Its frost of foam and rust of wrack
To rim her doorway square and black.
Beyond the sill a brooding shade,
Unruffled by the sunset's wraith
Where from the hearth it glimmered red,
Thronged all her little house with night.
One day that brought her cureless scathe
Had sorrow touched her comely head
With sudden snow there set in sight,

The seamew's wing and merle's wing mixt
Above kind eyes, and sad and bright,
With folded crease of care betwixt.)

"'Tis my grief: too young and old
Were they all to understand,
When the hunger came and cold;
Though I told them, oft I told,
How the blight was on the land,
And the people's crops around
Lay black-rotted in the ground,
And the good turf gone to loss
In the summer's teeming rain.
But my talk was all in vain.
God forgive me, I'd be cross,
For the children had me vexed,
When it's asking me they'd keep
From one morning to the next:
Would I give them ne'er a bit?
Troth and would I. Deep and steep

I'd have climbed, dear hearts, for it,
Or gone barefoot ten score mile.
But I'd naught, mavrone, I'd naught,
And belike the creatures thought
I had plenty all the while.

'So I'd bid them go to sleep,
Or I'd bid them run and play,
But, poor souls, the live-long day
They'd do nothing else than sit
Crouching close about the fire
I was pestered keeping lit
With the driftwood off the shore;
For thin branches, light and small,
Are the best I can drag higher
Through this shingle to the door,
Now I've no one any more
To be lending me a hand.

'But the trouble of my trouble,
Whatsoever may befall,

Day and night I ne'er forget,
Was my mother there, bent double
Till she looked no size at all
In her little old grey shawl,
With her heart, well knew I, set
On her evening cup of tea;
'Deed those times she missed it sore,
When I'd ne'er a grain to wet,
Though a word she wouldn't say.
'So when sunsetting was past,
She'd come creeping o'er the floor,
And reach down her cup and plate
Dinny brought her from Belfast—
They be shining yonder yet—
And she'd leave them standing ready,
For a sign to show 'twas late.
Then she'd sit again and wait,
Like a lad whose net is cast,
With the little trick she'd planned;

Ah, she'd watch me long and steady,
And I'd dread to stir or speak,
But I'd see her how at last
Very sorrowful she'd take
And fetch back the empty cup,
Making shift to hang it up
With her old hand all ashake;
Maybe thinking in her mind
I'd turned thankless and unkind—
Sure my heart came nigh to break.

'Many a time I wished to God
Not so much that He'd contrive
For the creatures' bit and sup,
Since the blight 's upon the land,
Scarce a spud left, scarce a sod,
Till the folks can hardly live,
And I wouldn't ask Him aught
That He mightn't have to give—
But I wished they would be let

Have the sense to understand,
So that less they'd grieve and fret,
And be sure I grudged them naught.
'Tis my bitter grief,' she said.

(The listening neighbour duly sought
To speak some witless, kindly word,
That wooeth hope, when hope lies dead.
Perhaps she heeded not nor heard,
So far she looked across the strand,
And past the lone fields of the sea,
Where light down fading paths was fled.)

''Tis my heart's long grief,' said she,
'For they ne'er could understand.'

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

Deceptaque non capiatur.

WHERE this narrow lane slips by,
All the land's breadth, over-glowed
Under amplest arching sky,
Seems a secret meet to keep
For these hedged banks close and high,
Till the turn of the road.
Then a curve of sudden sweep—
Lone and green the countryside,
Like a cloak, with scarce a fold,
And the white track's dwindling thread,
Lies in basking beams dispread:
You may look out far and wide
From the turn of the road.

There 's a gleam of rusted gold,
And a blink of eave-stained wall,
Up the lane a rood or so,
Where a thatched roof huddles low;
And a day will seldom fall
But its mistress, bent and old,
Rime-frost hair and little red shawl,
Through her black-gapped doorway fares,
Very frail and meagre and small,
And the years' unlifted load
With a faltering foot she bears
'Twixt the tall banks to and fro;
But her steps will ever stay
Ere the turn of the road—
Never reach it; you might guess
That they halt for feebleness,
Till you hear her story told.
For she says: 'The children all
Are a weary while away.

Years long since I watched them go –
'Twas when dawn came glimmering
cold—
Round the turn of the road.
And I'm lonesome left behind;
Yet time passes, fast or slow,
And they're coming home some day;
They'll come back to me, they said:
Just this morn that's overhead
It might chance, for aught I know.
'And that's always in my mind,
For I dream it in my sleep,
And I think it when I wake,
And when out of doors I creep
Towards the turn of the road,
Then a step I hardly make
But I'm saying all the while,
Ere another minute's gone
I may see them there, all three,

Coming home, poor lads, to me,
Round the turn of the road.
'But a stone's throw further on,
If I'd creep to where it showed
Like a riband stretched a mile,
And the longest look I'd take
Saw naught stirring on its white,
Sure my heart were fit to break.
'So or ever I come in sight,
Home I set my face again,
Lest I'd lose the thought that 's light
Through the darksome day. And then
If I find the house so still
That my heart begins to ache,
And a hundred harms forebode,
Ere my foot is o'er the sill,
I can think I needn't fret,
If they're maybe near me yet
At the turn of the road.'

A LONG DAY

(A Villanelle.)

I'm thinking all this day she may be dead,
(The holly-laden child that slum-ward hies),
Because I took away her bit of bread.
She'd hid it in the wall beside her head,
That she might reach it easily where she lies:
I'm thinking all this day she may be dead
For want of it. 'Twas but a little shred,
But ah, she 's weak, and if she starves and dies,
Because I took away her bit of bread,
I'll wish I'd choked. For since good-bye we said,
And then the cold was dark, before sunrise,
I'm thinking all this day she may be dead.

But here's a penny at last, and now instead
I'll bring the very biggest roll it buys,
Because I took away her bit of bread,
Straight home to her, that's waiting safe in bed,
No fear. Yet till I've seen her with my eyes,
I'm thinking all this day she may be dead,
Because I took away her bit of bread.

THE WRONG MAN

WHERE wild-heaped rubble o'erpeers the pit-
mouth black
He sits half dazed, scarce recking what betid
Since round his gang crashed roof and wall
in wrack—
Long since, it seems, so slow the dark hours
slid
While, with the hillside for his coffin lid,
Stifl ing he cowered, heart-sick and ears
astrain
For strokes, that now at last his path have rid
Back to blurred noon a-mist through bleak
March rain.

Groups come and go. A white face, pausing near
As rough girls point her, stares at him distraught;
Then wails: 'Not he? Ye've fooled me. Jack baint theer.
Yo' towd me, lass, yo'd seed him safely brought.
Yon? Yon 's Bob Smith, a drunken good-for-naught,
Owns wife nor barne t' axe gin he 's down or no.
An' Cap'en says t' rest on 'em 'll ne'er be raught—
Nay, t' wrang mon 's saved, lass: my mon 's lost below.'

Poor soul, whose shattered hope no hap shall mend:
Crushed into clay kind heart and strong hand lie.

But this man few had mourned as few befriend ;
He thinks so, maybe, while the folk pass by,
Not one face gladder that their grey-palled sky
Still metes him out his tale of drudging days
And sparse-strewn pleasures, matched in stall and sty :
Aye, the wrong man, for sure, as who gainsays ?

A cur, ungainly, hunger-pinched and old,
Who makes him halting haste on gaunt legs three,
Comes nigh and nigh with crouchings manifold,
Low whining to himself for fearful glee,
Till shag-pate rub against the grimy knee,
And pouncing paws. You watch a dim smile wake
Slow in the listless eyes : 'Eh, Grip,' says he,
'A be t' roight mon for yo' an' no mistake.'

OUTSIDE THE TOYSHOP

Beside the door they stand, anear the pane
Tricked with toy-wares. It is a dapple-grey
In smooth round wafers dight, and lifts alway
One prancing foot from grass-green board upta'en.
An urchin he, oft met down alley and lane,
Half lost in his wide old rags; agrin to-day,
Because he still with fearful joy dares lay
A stroking finger on that furry mane.

He tastes his perilous pleasure like a bird
Of quick small feet and wary eye, that comes
To peck strewn fragments, flown at breath scarce heard.

You smile among the hedgerows. In the slums
You think: When flits this child-glee lightly stirred,
Shall manhood's craving miss even these poor crumbs?

EXPECTATION

Fleet wheels had whirled for us, deep hedge-
rows threading,
Till where, down labyrinthine lanes enfolden,
The grey, green-mantled church stood, half
withholden
From passing eyes by elms full-fledged for
shedding
Midsummer shade, noon-shrunken, softly
spreading
O'er swarded path a dappled pavement, golden
And beryl-flecked, to a door, whose dusk-arch
olden
Let glimpse in hesitant gleams, the sill's gloom
dreading.

A knot of children, snowy-bibbed, blue-skirted,
Hung round the gate, from devious ways diverted;
Shawled crone's slow halt and girl's light foot one goal
Had found thereby. *Grand weather for whose wedding?*
Methought: and straight a daw from ivied steading
Swooped startled, as a bell began to—toll.

A HEART-HAUNTED HOME

'The heart-haunted home of the ever-faithful Gael.'

At Lisnamaine, since thither he comes no more,
'Tis but a-dream he sees where, little and lone,
The rough grey house sits like a boulder-stone
Fast by the foam-rimmed murmuring of the shore.
Only beyond black shadow across the floor
Yet glimmers red, as many a year agone,
More precious flame than ever bickering shone
From diamond's dew, or ruby's fiery core.

And, Mary Mother, grant yon light may burn
At Lisnamaine till this poor son's return;

Or if in sooth he must not here behold
The bliss he counts long exile days to earn,
Ah, lest too late his dear hope's doom he
learn,
Let so his eyes be dark, his heart be cold.

A WET EVENING

(Lady Day in Harvest, co. Kerry.)

The silvern circle of this summer lake,
Each ripple's curl a petal of mother-o'-pearl,
Curves iron-grim, since ruffling winds awake,
And tented mists unfurl.
The kingly shadow of the mountain-wall,
That purple and gold flung down with every fold
Across the crystal floor, is vanished all
In greyness blank and cold.
Its lifted peak, that while clear skies o'ershone,
With hyacinth crest their bluebell awning broke,

Stoops faintly, grown an old wan-visaged
crone
Huddled in her hodden cloak:
Far, far to seek the shining, lost and flown,
As yester-even's smoke.

Yet if to-morrow beam through amber rift,
How swiftly bright shall all flash back on
sight!
Still water's sheen, high slopes that glint and
shift
With sudden lawns of light.
Only in small chequered fields, begun to glow
With burning bloom of haulm and ear and
plume,
The glory, blurred away and stricken low,
What torch shall re-illume?
Storm-tangled, drenched, tossed dank on black
peat-mire,

Foam-flame of feathery gold—ah, wind and rain
That now conspire, forbear our hearts' desire,
And lest our year-long hope lie quelled and slain,
No spark be quenched save that the worlds' Hearth-fire
With morn may kindle again.

HONEY-HARVEST

Μὴ φθινοπωρὶς ἀνέμων
χειμερία κατὰ πνοὰ δαμαλίζοι χρόνον.

Setting of summer all golden and sun's setting
Glory kindle in a garden where flower-knots glow
Like a pane of jewelled stain from the lattice fallen low,
High that was holden in the wide west's fiery fretting.

Hummeth around it unceasing the land, hummeth
Loud with drone of the wheels that whir gathering rich gain,

Field by field bereft must yield, with each
amber-beaded grain
Man's hoard increasing ere the wintry dearth-
day cometh.

Guerdon of toil 'mid the blossoms, a rare
guerdon,
Filmy wings quiver questing and murmurous
make
Fragrant air round bud-lips fair, for the dew-
pure nectar's sake
Hid in their bosoms, now the honey-bee's
sweet burden.

Golden the granary's harvest, the hive's
golden,
Rapt from troubling of storm-blast, from frost-
blight's despair:

So be wise 'neath smiling skies, so, ere all
thy world lie bare,
Store—else thou starvest—store memories
dear and olden.

AN ERASURE

Charmed to most crystal stillness by a wand
Of sunlit calm, the mountain lake to-day
Thought all her steep groves over, leaf and spray,
Nor missed one dim bluebell or tawny frond—
So earnestly her lovely task she conned—
Or streak of gold-green turf that seemed a ray
'Twixt beechen stems, or lichened boulder grey,
Or curve of keen-edged crag uplift beyond.

And now the flagging pinion of a breeze
Scarce flicked the water, yet swift ripples press

With myriad lines to blur all trace of these.
Great wealth, sad heart, were thine did'st thou possess
But half her gift: such happy memories
To brood on—or such deft forgetfulness.

A WITCH'S WILL

(A. D. 167–)

When o'er the purple ridge the moon rist up
From founts of ebbing sunset to the brim
Full-filled with amber fire her clear-orbed cup,
Old Mother Deb, a witch-wife gaunt and grim,
Crouched by her cot-hearth watched as lights grew dim
Its dull red eye blink out. One friend with her
Sat glowering, embers twain of rounded rim
Kindled in coal-black of his fleckless fur.

Half to herself, and half to him—so cheat
Old lonesome folk their silence: 'Well, they've caught

Rob Pendrick,' quotha, 'pressed him for the fleet
In Falmouth town. I heard it where I bought
Our meal this morn. Wat Nesbit's good-for-naught
Curst wench soon nudged me out; but nigh the door
I hearkened. Marry, if once on board he 's brought,
He'll ne'er again belike set foot on shore.

'For, soothly, small account they make of such
On the high seas; there sink and burn amain
Spaniards, and Frenchmen, and the Devil's own Dutch;
And some pest-poisoned lie, or prisoners ta'en;
Fall as it may, they fare not home again.
This Rob was grown a likely lad beyond
His mates, for all, I 'll wager, blithe and fain
He 'd bear a hand to hale me through the pond.

'Time was—well, well, we have our day, one day,
At worst and best, and mine is done. So here
'Tis Molly Vance, his sweetheart, sits, they say,
Crying out her eyes for losing of her dear.
Mew, Malkyn, more fool she, who'll lack a tear
Ere ever she'll want for trouble her tears should rue;
That's plentier as I've known this many a year
Dry-eyed. Moll's young enough—she'll learn it too.

'Five guineas' fine they ask to let him go.
Gramercy, Sirs! A pretty price, in troth.
That bargain they'll scarce strike. A deal to show

For five good guineas! Yet I'll take mine oath
The silly maid down yonder, nothing loth,
Would freight their ship with gold, if gold she had—
Wants wit and wealth alike. By luck I've both,
And no concern, God wot, in lass or lad.'

Through fitful gloom she groped with tapping crutch,
Till at her feet it stirred a loose-laid flag
Hiding a hollow, and thence her eager clutch
Drew somewhat linen-lapt: a leathern bag,
Whose puckered mouth, still chuckling low, the hag
Twitched open, and, dropped from forth it, clink and chink,
Caught warily in her kirtle's miser rag
A store of coin that shone with silvern blink.

Coins large and less, from crown-piece broad, where pranced
The steed and writhed the worm, to meagre groat:
From some fire-new our pleasant monarch glanced,
Some, rim-worn, bore Queen Bess beruffed of throat.
But o'er them all the crone did lingering gloat,
Slipping them softly her fingers through and through,
As you shall mark fond grandams where they doat
Toy with a downy curl and praise its hue.

'That were a wedding not amiss to see,
A comely pair,' she said, 'but wind and wave

Will part them ere they're joined at such
a fee.
Lord, I used year on year to pinch and save
These same. No talk those times of Satan's
slave;
I had but skill in simples, as folk had aches,
So one a groat, and one a tester gave
For draughts to drug their pains or cure their
quakes.

'Yet if yon bells had rung for her, I doubt
They had ever knolled a bride across the
green
Could match with Molly. I might have lurked
about
And watched them where the lych-path runs
between
The privet hedge and yew: so thick their
screen,

A body would peep, and ne'er an urchin spy
To pelt me off with stones, as yester-e'en,
Lest harm betide them from the evil eye.

'But there—he sails,' quoth she, and bit by bit
'Gan purse her pelf up, slowly, as scarce she brooked
To shroud it. And when all the knots were knit,
Long, long upon her folded hoard she looked.
Then where the smouldering log glowed ruddiest nooked
She thrust a twig, and with its charred end black
Traced on the wrappage strokes uncouth and crookt:
For Moly Vance To Buye her Swetehert backe.

Forth to the night she went. By now its moon
Soared high in air, but film-flaked mists did weave
Her rays round, meshed as in a wan cocoon.
Up from the hamlet did the long slope heave
Slant grain-fields; and as skirting paths gave leave,
Down limped the Dame, where from the rustling edge
Ripe corn-ears bobbed at her, and oft her sleeve
Was plucked by briars that trailed about the hedge.

Niched at the hill-foot, Molly's cot deep-thatched
Stood very small and lone; yet nought of ill
Durst entrance seek, since by the door unlatched

The floor was strewn with trefoil, vervain, dill,
That grow to hinder witches of their will;
Nailed high, the horseshoe fended overhead,
And straws lay crossed aright athwart the sill:
Wherefore no gramarie's spell might there be spread.

And near the threshold, where first foot must find,
The witch her burden laid, and slunk away.
Even as she went, Moll, fallen asleep tear-blind,
Half wakened from a dream that down the Bay
She saw her lover sail. 'Alas the day,
My heart will break,' mourned she, 'will break outright.
I doubt not yon ill Dame, as neighbours say,
Has wrought me this shrewd turn for grudge and spite.'

But now Dame Deb, her sour face set for
home,
Was halting up the hillside. Clocks had
tolled
The small hours chill, and toward the western
foam
Low dipped the large moon, that with long
beams stoled
Those burnished harvest haulms in ghostly
gold.
One Farmer Thring, whose sleep betimes
did flit,
Looked forth, espied her footing past, and
cold
At marrow felt, with dire foreboding smit.

'The old hag abroad among the fields this
night—
What harm should that betoken? I'll be bound

There 's mischief brewing, murrain or storm
or blight;
By noon, mayhap, thick hailstones pelted
round,
White as our meal that never shall be ground.
Ay, where clouds wreck that such as she bid
sail—
Shame but her sort were ridded, roast or
drowned—
Bides little grist for mill, or grain for flail.'

Up climbed the slope and up. Steps halt
and weak
Tread ways unmeasured: 'twas in weary wise
Dame Deb toiled on to gain her dwelling
bleak,
What time such spectral gleams did haunt
the skies

As mock scared night in loitering day's disguise
Ere dawn. But all within her narrow room
Was mirkest shade. E'en Malkyn's glimmering eyes
Sleep sealed beside the cold hearth's blank of gloom.

There should the witch see brooding evermore
Twice-folden shadows, since herself had willed
To quench the joy-spark misery cowers o'er,
Numbed else by frore despair. Even so, heart-chilled,
Her latch she drew. Eftsoon the east fire-silled
Its rosed flame swept the dew-sprent meads along
Fast by her door, and blithe the finches trilled.
But where she bode came never shine nor song.

THREE THROWS AND ONE

Still dusk shuts out the shimmering sea,
shuts in the shadowy shore,
Where Con, the barefoot fisher-boy, comes
carrying sail and oar,
For to Norah Foyle of Inish Greine his heart
fares evermore.

The night-glooms follow and flit to blur his
footsteps on the sands,
Till they stay fast by the blink of foam, and
there he mourning stands:
'Ill luck for him that brings to woo full heart
and empty hands.'

A sigh wafts by of wave and wind, and all
the world lies dim:
But up on a sudden leaps the moon above
a black cloud's rim,
Like a salmon's leap from a dark pool, deep
where woodland waters brim.

And anon around him strand and tide in a
crystal clearness set,
And what but a stranger dame stands here,
where the furthest ripples fret?
O'er an owl-grey cloak long hair hangs white,
at her feet is a dun-coiled net.

'You are welcome, Con Neill; will you help
me, who weary of fishing alone?
Will you try for the marvels this meshes,
and grasp them, and make them your own?
Few enough be the fools would refuse, what
right many would sue to be shown.

'At each throw of my net there 's a life must
go down unto death in the sea;
At each throw of my net it comes laden,
O rare, with my wish back to me,
With my choice of all treasures most peerless
that lapt in the oceans be.

'For there lie fair jewels that blaze like the
bow of the heavens on fire:
Girdle and necklet and diadem, meet for a
High-Queen's tire,
And moonlight and sunlight of silver and
gold to the soul's desire.

'But look you, Con Neill, I will grant you
a boon you may bless evermore:
Three times you shall throw for a wish of
your own, and straight draw it to shore,
And then once for a gift I shall choose you
from spoil in the wide seas' store.

'Thrice and once, O Con Neill, yea, three times
shall you throw for a gift of your choosing,
And once more for a gift of mine own, that
your heart would be grieved at refusing:
Take and throw, wish and win, lest delaying,
life's luck you perchance may be losing.'

'Ah, Norah dhu, to wake the smile in your
dark eyes' night of stars
I'd beat the lonesome waters wide, that wash
o'er awful bars—
I throw, I throw; come weal or woe, 'tis
myself it makes or mars.

'Pearls first, a wreath of pearls I choose, yet
these although they bear
The sheen in them of moonlit foam, her
throat's white must not dare;
She shall twine them thick as snowberries in
the soft shade of her hair.'

A far voice cried across the tide like call of
scudding mew,
As the curven wave sucked in the net, that
home rich-fraught he drew;
The pearls were pure as bubbles blown of
lilies charmed to dew.

'A necklet where the emeralds shine more
bright than glance of snake,
And green as if young beechen-buds in flame
for leaf should break.
If I clasped it right where I would this night,
I'd think I dreamed awake.'

A moan strayed nigh 'twixt sea and sky,
as 'twere a wood-dove lost,
As to and fro, through ebb and flow, the net
went lightly tossed;
'Twas rayed with gleams like clear spray of
streams on sunny banks deep-mossed.

'Lo, now, this hand would hold and hide the
ransom of a king—
A diamond, flash of storm-cloud thralled to
lighten in a ring:
A wandering star that seeks its Heaven I'll
say to her I bring.'

A curlew's cry fled wailing by, most sad of
songs that soar,
As o'er the hollow ridges wan, and past the
foam-band hoar,
The dull net swept an owch of frost with a
fire-throb at its core.

'Now off and row for Inish Greine as fast as
oars may fall.
Sweet Norah dhu, a beggar I come, and come
with offer of all.
If I may give, and you will take, our luck is
great and small.'

'You are thankless, Con Neill, so I fear me,
forgetting the promise I gave,
And the gift of my choosing to throw for,
and draw to you out of the wave;
Yet perchance 'tis the dearest of any—a
treasure you'd perish to save.'

Like laughter through the stark, clear hush,
a wind came skirling high,
As once again the net he cast: 'This last
best chance have I,
For mine is hers, and hers God wish the
happiest under sky.'

But slowly, slowly creeps again, through
shallows homeward trolled,
For strain and stress so frail the net, its
strands seem loth to hold;
Shall he find this gift from the ocean's drift
his colleen's weight in gold?

Trailed slow and slow—yet swift doth grow
on sight and heart the dread—
Mavrone, mavrone, what hands of foam have
wreathed that dark-tressed head?
The wave runs home, but still as stone lies
Norah—drowned and dead.

'Are you dreaming, Con Neill, now, that witless
you stand while the wave ebbs away?
She has travelled the long road this night;
have you never a greeting to say?
Twine the pearls, set the ring on her finger;
no fear she would answer you nay.'

Like a salmon's leap in a dark pool, deep
where woodland waters brim,
Down on a sudden drops the moon behind
a black cloud's rim.
Con sees the white face of his doom through
all the world grown dim.

NEWS

When the low west falls suddenly shining
At the end of a sunsetting shower,
All its beams long and amber untwining,
Furled close under cloud for an hour,
O'er wet woods, o'er green meadows rain-scented,
The waft of a wind goes by,
To the patient, poor souls, and contented,
With a word, with a call, a cry.

For it says, in the Land of the Fairies
Every day, every hour, every minute,
A new pleasure that freshens and varies
Is waiting for us to begin it;

And before we could run where it beckoned,
Lo, more thronging bright in a band,
So that no one has time—not a second—
To be patient in Faery Land.

And it tells how this blithe Land of Faery
Groweth wilder and stranger and sweeter,
Because dewed are its ways sheen and airy
With promise of bliss still completer:
Star by star as it sets and it rises
Sees marvels just breaking at hand,
So that no one, for joys and surprises,
Is contented in Faery Land.

SLEEPING AND WAKING

She said to herself—'twas a girl ranging
pleasaunce and lawn,
Her eyes clear and bright with sweet fancies
because she was young,
And, singing, heard echoes in answer of songs
never sung,
And saw past the sunset strange portals of
morrows to dawn—

She said to herself of a while: 'Pity 'tis to
be sleeping,
For slumber brings silence and shadow,
though softly it fall.
What are dreams? Not an hour of my day
would I change for them all.'

For how could she tell her delight lay in
one dream's keeping?

She said to herself—an old woman just
creeping about,
Adrowse like the flies half-waked that stir in
a wintry sun,
With only a sigh for her songs, and her
good days all done,
And long beams withered low on the west,
and long shades stolen out—

She said to herself oftentimes: 'Pity 'tis to
be waking,
So chill grows this sorrowful world for the
weary and old;
Better dream, that a wraith of my lost I may
haply behold'—
For how should she reck of a dream beyond
slumber's breaking?

Yet one of her days, though it darken, bereft
of a gleam,
Black-omened with hauntings of fear, of the
last hope forsaken,
If an old, old woman should sleep, and a girl
should awaken,
Where desire of all hearts dwelleth deep in
a dream of the Dream.

IN SANCTUARY

Across the lone floor of the rayless night
One came to a door that was barred on light,
A glimmer agleam through beckoning chink,
As with lamp's still beam, as with taper's
blink.
And sore she sued their shrine to win,
From mirk and moan of the wild shut in,
And fled the fear its menace bore
With shrouding of shadow evermore.

So out of the dark, as it breathed its dread,
Shrill crying, she knocked with a hope ill-sped,
For grim and stark that portal wide
At her hand's touch mocked, and her prayer
denied.

Then sick at heart, that found not grace,
She turned her again the night to face,
As terror turns on swift-foot foes—
And lo! the clear east all climbing rose.

A RUIN

Clausi tenebris et carcere caeco.

Mirk on clear skies, swept afar,
Swart sail of thunder
Drift with the hid fraughting fire,
Fierce as from heart of a star,
That smiting hath shattered in sunder
A dungeon bale-haunted and dire,
A keep long accursed by the scathe
Of a captive held hope-reft thereunder,
Who here at light's birth, in heaven's breath,
Tastes wonder on wonder.

This prisoner wist not how his harm befell,
Nor recked of fairer lot than ever to dwell

Girt by those walls. Yet was their ampler
room
His earliest memory, with its midday gloom
Grey near a casement's blink, high noon for
him;
And Paradise he saw if green and dim
Some shadowy bough swung in and out of
sight
Athwart the crevice, his one dull jewel of light,
Soon lost. For doomed he was in that fell
tower
To obey the ban of its compelling power,
That led him, loth, to where, more dark and
strait,
His chamber with no chink prepared a fate
Full piteous. Yet his griefs but halted
there;
Needs must he follow anon down narrower
stair

That nightmare guide, till his groping deaf and blind
Touched fresh despair: the stair begin to wind
He felt: he knew that solid dark and cold
Furled coiling, closing round him fold on fold,
Still, step by step. And ever as down he went
A weight of horror pressed sore on him, and pent
The frenzy, risen up else to end in wrack,
All sense dashed out against those barriers black.
And ever as down he went, foul crawling things
He brushed with hand or foot, of slime or stings
Inevitable aware with shuddering heed.
Then through an age-long pause seemed he a seed

Of anguish, whelmed alone in some vast orb,
That list not loose, nor list his life absorb,
To make the world-great atom of misery naught.
Thus, poised o'er stifling pangs stood Time,
and circling brought
The same woe's hour.
Whereon a crash, a glare,
A ruin uprooted, glory of limpid air
In eyes joy-wildered. Nay, beyond, around,
What regions marvellous wrought with sight
and sound,
Of greeting voice and face what master-bliss,
May ne'er be told, and but surmised amiss
By hearts that seek in dreams such haps as
this:—
Mirk on clear skies, swept afar,
Swart sail of thunder
Drift with the hid fraughting fire,
Fierce as from heart of a star,

That smiting hath shattered in sunder
A dungeon bale-haunted and dire,
A keep long accursed by the scathe
Of a captive held hope-reft thereunder,
Who here at light's birth, in heaven's breath,
Tastes wonder on wonder.

AN EMIGRANT

Usque adeo quiddam proprium notumque requirit.

Is she asleep, asleep
Alone, in fair far land?
With murmuring lulled that deep
And shadowy waters keep
Fast by the flower-lit strand,
Is she asleep, asleep?

If she awake, awake
On bliss-embowering shore,
Be sure her heart will break
For the old sad voices' sake
That reach to her no more,
If she must wake, must wake.

Ah! guard her dream, her dream,
Though songs call blithe and clear
About the enchanted stream;
Lest reft in sooth she seem
Of all she loves to hear,
Rest she adream, adream.

THE HAPPY DEAD

When he for whom, through portals strangely wrought
Of eye and ear, the watchful senses bore
From realms of light and sound a stintless store,
Or thrilled, with many a subtler message fraught,
Down myriad fibres fine: when he is taught
To leave the league of nerve with brain—Death's lore—
In that new world shall he indeed no more
Remember days when these have served his thought?

For haply there may power that passeth men's
Wait on his will, to make the mirroring lens,
The quivering cord, poor tools of mortal wight,
Weak aid and cumbrous seem, and so for him
Earth-life on memory loom all dusk and dim
As ways trod once through blinding mirk of night.

DISAPPOINTMENT

A TWOFOLD harm we hate in thy one name,
Thou who a bitter foe still enterest
At doors set wide to greet the longed-for guest;
A spy to track our hope the way she came,
And stab her at the goal; a juggler's game,
That tricks with least for most, and worst for best;
Spiller of o'er-brimming joy-cups; Fate's old jest:
A pleasure poisoned, and a frustrate fame.

Thus many speak thy blame, and none denies;
Yet some there be who dream that far from here
Men meet thee as they fare in friendlier guise:
Rued loss's gain, dawn-rose on midnight drear,
Swift guide through wonder-gates of rapt surmise,
Blithe laughter in the mask-reft face of Fear.

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